(1)

Thai Culture in Brief

by Sujit Punyanubhab

(Asian Culture Quarterly) Vol. V. No 3. 1977.

1. Historical Background of the country and people

The Word "Thai" means "free" and therefore "Thailand" means "the Land of the Free"

Formerly conflicting opinions and theories prevailed as to the origins of the Thais. Even in two decades before this we could speak with more certainty that they originated in Northwestern Szechuan of China about 4,500 years ago. But after the discovery of many instruments and artifacts at the village of Ban Chiang, Nongkarn District, Udornthani Province, the theory about the origins of Thai people have been changed into a new one. It might be that the Thai people settled down here in Thailand and then scattered to various parts of the world even to some parts of China. This was due to the 14 Carbon test of Artifacts which showed that Thailand might be the first place of Bronze Age ever discovered in any part of the world, for it has some artifacts older than ~~x~~ what was unearthed in the Near East by about 500 years.

"Siam" was the name of the country well known to the world until 1939 and again between 1945 and 1949, then on May 11, 1949 there was a proclamation changing the name of the country into "Prathet Thai" or "Thailand"

2. Six Major periods of the Thai History

1. Ancient period. 4500 years ago when the Thai people settled down in north western Szechuan and scattered in the fan like manner along the valley of the ~~yangste~~ yangtse River.

2. Nanchao Period 588 years (650-1238) The kingdom was situated in Yünnan in the Southern part of China.

3. Sukhothai period 128 years (1238-1350) Sukhothai was the first capital city when the Thai people moved and settled down in the northern part of Siam overcoming the Khmers' influence. There were 6 kings altogether of "Pra Ruang" dynasty during the period of 128 years.

4. Ayudhya Period 417 years (1350-1767) With the new dynasty. Ayudhya was the first capital city ~~of~~ situated in the central part of Siam. There were 34 kings of various dynasties during the 417 years.

5. ~~Dhon~~ Dhonburi Period - only 15 years (1767-1782). After the fall of Ayudhya, King Tak Sin established Dhonburi the new capital on the west bank of Chao Phraya River opposite to Modern Bangkok

6. Bangkok or Ratanakosin Period began in 1782. Bangkok has been established the present capital City of Thailand under the reigns of nine successive Kings of Chakri dynasty for 190 years to this day.

Thai Culture

The word 'culture' means 'way of life" or "Social heritage." It embraces all forms of human response to environments. Different meaning between culture and civilization is that culture includes all aspects of way of life whether they may be primitive or Modern ones while civilization means only "The stage of being brought out of barbarism or the advanced stage in social development."

Culture may be divided into various aspects as follows;

Linguistic, Aesthetic, Customary and Traditional, material culture and spiritual culture.

Linguistic Culture – means language including reading and writing process. The Thai language is of monosyllable. In writing and in speaking it has music tones to denote different meanings of the same word as klai, if pronounced differently means near but if in another way means far.

2. Six Major periods of the Thai History

1. Ancient period. 4500 years ago when the Thai people settled down in north western Szechuan and scattered in the fan like manner along the valley of the ~~yangste~~ yangtse River.

2. Nanchao Period 588 years (650-1238) The kingdom was situated in Yünnan in the Southern part of China.

3. Sukhothai period 128 years (1238-1350) Sukhothai was the first capital city when the Thai people moved and settled down in the northern part of Siam overcoming the Khmers' influence. There were 6 kings altogether of "Pra Ruang" dynasty during the period of 128 years.

4. Ayudhya Period 417 years (1350-1767) With the new dynasty. Ayudhya was the first Capital city ~~of~~ situated in the central part of Siam. There were 34 kings of various dynasties during the 417 years.

5. ~~Dhon~~ Dhonburi Period - only 15 years (1767-1782). After the fall of Ayudhya, King Tak Sin established Dhonburi the new capital on the west bank of Chao Phraya River opposite to Modern Bangkok

6. Bangkok or Ratanakosin Period began in 1782. Bangkok has been established the present capital City of Thailand under the reigns of nine successive Kings of Chakri dynasty for 190 years to this day.

Thai Culture

The word 'Culture' means 'way of life" or "Social heritage." It embraces all forms of human response to environments. Different meaning between culture and civilization is that culture includes all aspects of way of life whether they may be primitive or Modern ones while civilization means only "The stage of being brought out of barbarism or the advanced stage in social development".

Culture may be divided into various aspects as follows:

Linguistic, Aesthetic, Customary and Traditional, Material Culture and spiritual Culture.

Linguistic Culture — means language including reading and writing process. The Thai language is of monosyllable. In writing and in speaking it has music tones to denote different meanings of the same word as klai, if pronounced differently means near but if in another way means far.

Another word is 'Sua', it can be pronounced in three different ways meaning: tiger, a mat and a coat. In writing we have ~~some~~ same symbols above the written word to guide the reading. Thailand has her own characters including figures, compared with England which uses Roman characters and Arabic figures.

Aesthetic Culture — means harmony, beauty and sweetness of what was made and ~~invested~~ invented by human beings. The word 'fine arts' includes painting, ~~scl~~ sculpture, architecture, drama and music. The Thai paintings of Ancient time discovered at a Southern province of Thailand, Yala, were dated between the 10th and 13th centuries. The first fairly well preserved painting has been discovered at Ayuthya ancient monastry which was founded in 1424 A.D.

The Thai sculpture is mostly the arts of forming the images of the Buddha. It is of five periods:

Chiangsaen period - 11th - 13th century A.D.
Sukho Thai " - 13th - 15th " " "
U-Thong " = 13th - 15th " " "
Ayuthya " = 1350 - 1767 " "
Ratanakosin or Bangkok " - 1782 - 1868 A.D.

The Thai ~~art~~ architecture besides making residential houses is mostly connected with royal palace and monastery buildings and pagodas which are of their own typical structure as may be seen in Bangkok.

The Thai drama is of many kinds such as Khon or the masked play, Lakhon Nok (played by both men and women) Lakhon Nai (played by women only) and so on. Thai classic dances are mostly some parts of dramatic entertainments.

The Thai music instruments are of four kinds; the instrument of flipping or snapping, drawing, percussion and woodwind.

Another kind of Thai art is the inlaid work of the mother-of-pearl used to decorate window and door panels of the shrine hall in the monastery and some utensils.

Customary and traditional culture of Thailand is mostly on the basis of human relation and Buddhism, such as when the sun enters the Zodiac of Aries generally on April 13 every year. The Thai people celebrate Songkran Festival by paying respect to their parents, old relatives, pouring water and perfumes into their hands and

in return their parents and old relatives will utter some words of blessing for their happiness and prosperity. Besides this they go to the nearest monastery paying homage to Buddhist monks, venerating and pouring water and perfumes at the image of the Buddha as a kind of worship, freeing birds and fish as a gift of freedom and life and finally dedicating meritorious parts to the departed ancestors (श्राद्ध ?) various kinds of entertainments will follow after that.

Modesty, paying respect to the parents, the elders, the teachers and Buddhist monks, accepting and following admonition of parents and teachers are cultural structure of the Thai custom and tradition.

Speaking of Thai spiritual culture, we cannot leave Buddhism aside because Buddhism has played its important roles in the way of life of the Thai people from Sukhothai period (700 years ago) up till now.

There have been some statements in the stone inscriptions of Sukhothai period as may be quoted in essence as follows:

"Good are the Sukhothai people. They are of generous and moral habits, always observing precepts and giving alms. The people of this ~~Tt~~ Sukholtai, old and young, male and female, all of them are pious, cherishing their faith in Buddhism, each observing precepts during the rainy season. After the ~~E~~ Lent, the Kathin (The ceremony of saffron robe presentation) is observed for a period of one month."

The Thai people who addhere to various faiths as shown in percentage by the office of national statistics are as follows:

Buddhists	93.6
Muslim	3.9
Christians	0.6
others	1.9

There are more than 300,000 Buddhist monks and novices and more than 25,000 Buddhist monasteries throughout the country"

There are two Buddhist Universities and about 7000 schools

for Buddhist education run by ecclesiastical authorities. These schools and universities do not include the more than 10,000 schools for boys and girls which are situated in the monasteries.

Indian Influence on Thai Laws

The text of Thai laws is furnished by the Pramuan Kotmai Ratchakan thi nueng (the legal code of Rama I) or the Laws of three Seals. When Ayodhya was destroyed by the Burmese in 1767 about 90% of the legal material then available at that time perished. New laws were made but work on them did not begin until 1804 when a case forced it. A case came up in a law-court. In which the court gave divorce to a husband and wife. The husband did not agree with the judgement and appealed against it. Not only the judgement was in defiance of the rules then existing but it appeared to be unjust. King Rama I felt the necessity of examining all the rules then existing. He set up a Committee for the purpose. The idea was that the rules or laws must follow the Pali Canon. Wherever they were at variance with it they were to be changed to agree with it so that they could be restored to their pure form. The Committee continued its labours for eleven months and submitted its report which in the form of the new Codification became the law for Thailand. Since it follows Pali Canon it is dharmic its basic purpose is ethical conduct of society

From the brief that was given to the Committee, as stated above, it should be clear that it was not to suggest any fresh laws but to examine only the existing rules, the Dhammasattha, Sanskrit dharmasastra, into conformity with the Pali canon. And what is the aim of dhammasattha? In the words of Prince Dhani Nivat it is:

w.e./

'According to the old dhammasattha, the ideal monarch abides steadfastly in the ten kingly virtues, constantly upholding the five common precepts... He later pains to study the dhammasattha

Hooker, M.B., 1. The Indian-Derived Law Texts of South East Asia, Journal of Asian Studies, Chicago, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, Feb. 1978.

for Buddhist educations run by ecclesiastical authorities. These schools and universities do not include the more than 10,000 schools for boys and girls which are situated in the monasteries.

The Indian influence is marked on the conception of monarchy in Thailand as well. There are three principles on which it rests: that the monarch is a patriarchal figure (Sukhothai period), that his person is assimilated with god, the principle of divine kingship, and the third that an ideal monarch is a monarch of righteousness, abiding in the ten kingly virtues and pursuing the Four Proper Modes of Conduct. The modes of conduct were associated with the concept of Cakravartin – the sovereign of the universe. It was this Cosm view that was the one most influential in the time of King Rama I. The consequence of all the three views, of course, was the absolute monarchy, whose kingship was a symbol of the cosmos itself, whose function was not legislation but the preservation of the sacred laws.

Vol. XXXVI No 2. 'Journal of Asian Studies' February 1977

Complexity in the Thai Religious System: An Interpretation

A. Thomas Kirsch

(is associate Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at Cornell University)

Complexity has characterized the Thai religious system since atleast 1292, when the well known inscription of Rama Kamhaeng was composed. (A. B. Griswold & Prasert Na Nagara, "The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen of Sukhodaya (1292 A.D)", Journal of the Siam Society. LIX (1971), pp 179-228, is the most recent translation of this inscription, it includes a discussion of previous translations.) This inscription not only celebrates the devotion of his people of Sukhothai to theravada Buddhism but also notes a special relationship between the prosperity of the kingdom and reverence for Phra-Khaphung, a "spirit-deity" living in a nearby mountain. Phra Khaphung is characterized as a phī-thewadā, combining phī (an indigenous Thai form meaning "spirit" "ghost") with thewadā (a form derived from Hindu-Buddhist cosmology and meaning "deity"). This classification of Phra Khaphung suggests that a process of merging two once distinct religious traditions had already begun.

The co-existence of indigenous and non-indigenous elements in thai religion has persisted throughout subsequent thai history. For example, when Rama I sought to reestablish order after the Burmese sack of the capital of Ayutthaya in 1767, one of his first decrees listed the various

types of "spirits" (Phī) and "deities" (thewadā) that might legitimately be honoured by sacrifices. However, the King reminded his subjects that good fortune and affliction alike ultimately result from "Karma", not from the actions of spirits of gods. He emphasized that the Triple Gems of Buddhism were higher than all other laws, and that no other religious precepts could be held superior to these of Buddhism. (This decree, issued on 21st Aug. 1782, is cited in H.R.H. Chula Chakrabongse, Lords of Life: The Paternal Monarchy of Bangkok, 1782-1932. (London: Redman 1960), p. 89. See also R. Lingat (ed.), Pramūan kotmāi ratchakān thī nyng (Legal codes of King Rama I), Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1938)

Observers of the current Thai religious situation, rural or urban, have noted that Thai religion still manifests similar complexity. (B. J. Ter~~wet~~ wiel, "A model for the study of Thai Buddhism" [hereafter MSTB].

This intricate mix of indigenous and non-indigenous elements is not the religious pluralism of the west, a situation in which tolerance exists for a competition among a number of distinct and autonomous faiths for the religious adherence of the populace. Thai religious complexity is of the sort commonly characterized as syncretic, in which elements derived from several historically discrete traditions have combined

to form a single distinctive tradition. In such a situation, individuals may simultaneously hold beliefs or practice rituals derived from different traditions, without any apparent sense of incongruity.

The Thai share this situation of religious complexity with other South and Southeast Asian peoples who commonly identify themselves as Theravada Buddhists: the peoples of Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. In fact it has frequently been observed that Theravada Buddhism is never the sole religious component in these societies, that there are invariably "non Buddhist" religious elements present as well, leading H-D. Evers to suggest that Theravada Buddhism is, in some sense, an "incomplete" religion. At any rate, the fact of religious complexity in Theravada Buddhist societies has been a matter of interest for some time. And two broad strategies have been used to investigate it: one approach might be characterized as historical, the other as a more synchronic structural-functional or social science approach.

The historical approach to understanding Thai religion is exemplified by the efforts of such scholars as K. Landon and R. Le May. They distinguished the various elements that make up Thai religion, principally by identifying their historical origin—e.g.

indigenous - animist. Brahmanic, Buddhist. These constituent elements were further identified with the various epochs in Thai history in which they were assumed to have been first adopted by the Thai. This approach has often produced what might be called the "stratigraphic" and the 'thin veneer' perspectives. Thai (or Sinhalese, Burmese, etc) religion is seen as made up of a number of discrete "layers" of religious belief and practice, one piled haphazardly on the other. The practitioners of this approach seem to have assumed that religion is intrinsically irrational. But they also seem to have been impressed with the apparent persistence of indigenous - animistic elements, which suggested to them that the non - indigenous religious elements formed a thin veneer over the basically animistic propensities of the nominally Buddhist masses (i.e scratch a Buddhist; find an animist) emphasizing historical origins, followers of this approach have generally left unexplored a number of questions about the relationships between the various religious elements, questions of special interest to the followers of the other approach to religious complexity

The main aims of the Structural-functional approach have been to investigate the relationships among the various religious components found in Theravada Buddhist societies, and/or to discover any social correlates of religious beliefs and practices in the non religious spheres of these societies. This approach is ~~favored~~ favored by most contemporary anthropologists and other social scientists interested in Theravada Buddhism. Although none of the scholars who have pursued the structural-functional approach has ignored the historical depth of Theravada Buddhism, or the religious and non-religious spheres of the societies they have studied, their primary aim has been a synchronic analysis. That is they have sought to demonstrate relationships between the various religious components, or between the religious and nonreligious spheres independent of the historical contexts in which they are found. The structural-functional approach has been extremely productive, highlighting agreements on such matters as the primacy of Buddhism in these complex religious systems. It has also produced some disagreements of interpretation - such as whether we can see a single syncretized religious system or a number of distinct and alternative religious systems.

This is well illustrated in the works of M. Ames and M. Spiro. In their studies of Sinhalese and Burmese religion, respectively, Ames and Spiro each distinguish two components. A theravada Buddhist component and a non-theravada Buddhist "Component. Ames labels his non-Buddhist component 'magical-animism". spiro prefers "supernaturalism" or simply 'animism." Although both recognize a degree of internal complexity in each of the two components, apparently the Buddhist one has been

identified through a number of unambiguous criteria, while the non-Buddhist one seems to have a residual character. That is, any religious element not identifiable as "Buddhist" is classed as "non Buddhist" or animist. Given this distinction, Ames and Spiro conclude that Buddhism maintains a paramount position with Sinhalese/Burmese religion. But they disagree on the relationship between the two components, on whether there is a single integrated religious system or multiple - and perhaps antagonistic - systems. Ames sees in Sinhalese religion a functional division of labor between Buddhism and magical-animism: the Buddhist component specializing in ultimate and other-worldly concerns, the magical-animist component in more mundane thisworldly matters. He also proposes that the magical-animist component performs key socialization and therapeutic functions for the adherents of Buddhism, linking both components into a _single_ religious system. Spiro sees a similar division in Burmese religion: Buddhism being concerned with the supermundane, and animism with the mundane. But he maintains that Buddhism and Burmese supernaturalism do not form a single syncretized religious system. Though he does see Buddhism as paramount, Spiro proposes that Buddhism and animism each

represent distinct and - to some extent - alternative religious systems.

Terwiel has recently suggested that some of the differences in interpretation respecting religious complexity in those societies where we find Theravada Buddhism may be due to differences in theoretical perspective. Certainly Ames and Spiro represent different theoretical preferences within anthropology - a sociological emphasis and a psychological emphasis, respectively. However, some of the differences recorded seem to be due to the unique historical situations of the societies under consideration. For example, caste considerations play some role in Sinhalese religion, while caste has not been a factor in most Southeast Asian religions. Other differences also exist. For example, the relative stress placed on novicehood in Burmese religion seems to contrast with the stress on monkhood in Sri Lanka and Thailand.

One problem in the study of those societies in which Theravada Buddhism is found is the temptation to treat both Buddhism and Buddhist society as single enduring entities that can be abstracted from the flux of particular social life. In fact, such an approach can be useful. But we can also view Buddhism and Buddhist society as variables, conditioned by the circumstances in which they are found - including the non-Buddhist religious elements invariably found with Buddhism, and the historical circumstances of each

Buddhist Society. From this perspective, the Religious systems in which Buddhism plays a dominant role, and the Societies in which these religious systems are found, represent a range of variations rather than a single entity. Such an approach may allow us to see relationships within and between both the complex religious systems and the societies influenced by Theravada Buddhism. it may also pave the way for a truly comparative study of Theravada Buddhism as a living religion of its impact on the lives of real people rather than sociological abstractions. It is in this context that I shall sketch out a perspective on Thai religious complexity which may reveal similarities to and differences from other Theravada Buddhist Societies; that is, the Thai situation viewed as part of a range of variation found in Theravada Buddhist Societies.

The Thai case is similar to those of Sri Lanka and Burma in that Buddhism maintains a paramount position within a complex religious situation. However I distinguish three components in Thai religion (rather than the two of Ames and spiro) Buddhism a Brahmanistic component, and an animistic component. Each will be examined along a number of dimensions: goal orientation and world-view, ritual, specialists, participants, and social focus. I shall indicate some of the ways these three components

are interrelated to form a perduring pattern; hence my concern is primarily structural-functional. However I shall also set out an historical perspective in which the formation and development of this pattern may be viewed, and suggest some ways this pattern has undergone changes in recent years.

Theravada Buddhism in Thai religion

Rama Kamhaeng's inscription is only one of many that indicate that by the thirteenth century the Thai had established a number of powerful states in the area now part of northern Thailand. These inscriptions also indicate that theravada Buddhism occupied a prominent place in these states, although the specific agencies through which the Thai first encountered Buddhism are not completely clear. From the fourteenth century on, the major center of Thai power shifted southward to Ayutthaya, which was influenced in important respects by the hinduized Khmer, especially after the thai conquest of Angkor in the late fourteenth century. Despite these Khmer influences, however, Buddhism retained its paramount position in the Ayutthayan religious system. In the eighteenth century a further southward shift in Thai power took place, centering it on Bangkok. Rama I's inscription reiterates - at the very foundation of what was to become the modern Thai state - the centrality of Buddhism to the Thai. In Contemporary Thailand, Buddhism is recognized as the State religion and enjoys special government support, although recent constitutions have guaranteed freedom of religion. The Thai King must be a buddhist, to maintain his role as defender of the faith. The official sanction of buddhism merely formalizes and affirms the

Commitments and attitudes of the Thai people generally. For them there is close link between being Thai and being Buddhist.

Theravada Buddhism maintains its unity and continuity through a common core of doctrines and rituals sustained and perpetuated by the monastic institution (the Sangha) Some generalizations about sophisticated Buddhism might well apply to any buddhist society. I will argue that, in Thai Society, the values and beliefs of Buddhism are not restricted to a small group of virtuosos and literati, but influence the mass of Thai. These values and beliefs set the religious context that has shaped the institutional fabric of Thai society and in which the Thai live their everyday lives. Buddhist values, conceptions, and attitudes color virtually all aspects of Thai life, pervading the thai attitude toward the world in which they live.

Buddhist Goal Orientations & World view.

Philosophical Buddhism postulates two levels of reality: one, the phenomenal world of everyday experience, a world of ignorance and illusion; the other, the world of the Karmically Conditioned, the domain of ultimate religious reality. It should be noted that these two levels of reality are not completely distinct and separate worlds; they are two perspectives on the same world. These two perspectives on reality are based in a number of key Buddhist doctrines, in particular those of Karma and of multiple rebirth. Karma holds that each act carries its own load of religious merit (Bun – पुण्य) and/or demerit (bāp – पाप) which automatically accrues to the actor. Multiple rebirth postulates that one works out the implications of his merits and demerits over a long series of lifetimes. Buddhism also locates the religious causes of suffering and of evil in action in the world, action motivated by

desire and attachment to worldly things. Since the causes of suffering are located in the world, the aim of the Buddhist is to free himself from desire and attachment, to escape from the world, to gain nirvana or "extinction." The formal goal of escaping from the cluches of Karma is the basis for characterizing Buddhism as radically other worldly.

In Thailand, as in other Buddhist societies, knowledge of sophisticated doctrines and striving to attain Nirvana are restricted to extremely dedicated monks and possibly a few laymen. Though Buddhists, most Thai do not aspire to such an abstract religious goal as nirvana. The mass of Thai Buddhists aspire to a more proximate version of the ultimate goal, a sojourn in paradise (sawan- स्वर्ग) and/or an enhanced status in some future life. Such aspirations may appear to savor of a this-worldly attitute, but they should not be viewed as simple inversions of the other worldly thrust of Buddhist thought. A time in paradise or an enhanced rebirth status are deemed to be appropriate rewards for proper behaviour, rewards that signify one is moving along the path to the more difficult and abstract ultimate goal. Such pervasive and popular tales as the Phra Wedsandon Chadok (Vessantara Jataka) not only provide lay Buddhists with exemplars of proper modes of behavior involving renunciation and compassion; they also serve to remind them that their religious life is a long and difficult journey worked out over a series of lifetimes with numerous stopping points. The main point of articulation between a Thai lay person and Buddhist values and beliefs is not through such esoteric doctrines as Karma, or even such formulations as the Four Noble Truths or Eightfold Path. Most Thai are linked to Buddhism through popular beliefs about 'merit' (bun) and the pervasive ritual system connected with these beliefs, 'merit-making' (tham bun).

Ideas about merit and merit-accumulation seem to be ubiquitous in Thailand; individuals frequently account for events and experiences in their lives in terms of their relative store of merit; all statuses, situations, and events can – potentially, at least – be interpreted and

explained in terms of merit. In doctrinal terms, the individual might be thought of as the culmination of karma garnered through past lives as well as the present one. In simpler terms, each individual might be viewed as being a balance of accumulated merits and demerits. One's moral actions are aimed at altering this balance in a favorable direction, moving one further along the path to the ultimate religious goal. Popular belief affirms what sophisticated doctrine teaches: the merit balances of some are better or more favorable than those of others. Both sophisticated doctrine and popular belief sanction the notion that there are intrinsic inequalities among humans with respect to their moral status. Further, this view is crystallized in doctrine and popular belief by elaborate cosmological hierarchies including all sentient beings: gods (thevada), human beings (manut), spirits (phi), animals (sad) and demons (pret).

This cosmological hierarchy forms a basic part of the Buddhist world-view and provides a 'perspective' on the 'individualism' thought to characterize Buddhism. In contrast to the more ascriptive and collective emphasis found in classic Hindu belief, Buddhism generally emphasizes the individual's control over his own moral fate. But the Buddhist world-view assumes that the individual is working out his/her moral life within a hierarchically structured and differentiated universe that includes a variety of other acting beings. Indeed the Buddhist message is, in part, to free oneself from attachments to such other beings, in order to rise higher in moral hierarchy. We shall see that the various dimensions of this hierarchy are manifested within the context of Buddhist rituals, and that its perpetuation is widely held in Thai social value.

A final observation about Buddhist values and world-view concerns the 'achievement' elements found in both sophisticated and popular Thai Buddhism. The Buddhist injunction might be characterized as: 'Be merit-mobile'! Neither passive contemplation nor quietistic acceptance of one's fate will improve one's moral balance and move one closer to the proximate or abstract Buddhist goals. The Buddhist world-view encourages the individual to participate in situations productive of merit, the ritual complex of merit-making activities.

Buddhist Ritual

As characterized above, formal Buddhism involves such abstractions as an emphasis on achievement within a complex differentiated moral hierarchy, individualism, and freeing the self from attachments. Doctrinal Buddhism

of merit-making activities by others, because through their ordination, they have voluntarily given up their kinsmen, neighbours and friends, and all features of ordinary society, to assume the rigorous discipline of the religious life. The ordination ritual is itself a dramatic display of a number of key themes of abstract Buddhism: moral hierarchy, merit achievement and freeing oneself from attachment for moral rewards. The ordination ritual symbolically transforms the ordinand from a layman — classed as an 'ordinary person' (khon) — to a monk, classed as a 'merit-field object' (sing). The transformation is accompanied by a dramatic change in demeanor on the part of the new monk, and in the attitudes of others toward him. Once ordained, the monk must act with solemnity and restraint, and he must be treated — even by parents, siblings, and closest friends — with the special forms of respect reserved for monks. Whenever Thai encounter or interact with monks, they are inescapably reminded of the complex moral hierarchy of formal Buddhism and of the importance of freeing oneself from worldly attachments.

The contrast between monks (as 'merit-field objects') and the class of 'ordinary persons' sets out the two major categories of the Buddhist hierarchy encountered in everyday life. In addition, each of these categories is internally differentiated. For example, monks share the category "merit-field object" with kings, high royalty, Buddha images, and other revered entities. An example of internal differentiation within the category "ordinary persons" can be seen in the fact that certain laymen act as masters of ceremony during some rituals; these men are commonly highly respected for their piety and previous service as monks. Women might be seen as standing at the bottom of the Buddhist hierarchy, for they cannot aspire to be monks, at least in this lifetime. Indeed this is one rationale used to explain why women tend to be given responsibility for routine merit-making chores like daily alms-giving: women need these opportunities more than men, who have the opportunity to be monks if they so choose.

The Buddhist hierarchy displayed in recurrent ritual situations in everyday life is both specific and general, local and superlocal. In rural areas and towns, the neighbourhood temple is the locus of merit-making activities. At least some local monks are likely to be the kinsmen, neighbours, and friends of the very people who provide support through merit-making. However, this support is not provided because of kinship or other ties, but rather because the monks have formally given up these ties on entering the Sangha. All monks are deserving of respect and support, not just those of the local temple. Indeed superlocal elements, built into a number of Buddhist ceremonies, serve to underline the supralocal character of the Buddhist hierarchy. The Kathin ceremony, which takes place at the end of the rainy season and involves giving monastic robes and other necessities to the monks of a selected temple, provides

an example.

Kathin are the elaborate ceremonies; the most spectacular being those sponsored by the king in which he or his emissary — in a colorful procession — delivers robes and other goods to royal temples along the Chao Phraya river. Kathin are also sponsored by villagers, groups of kinsmen and friends, government offices, co-workers, etc. They have a collective aspect, and often involve long range planning and extensive preparation. It is notable that the temple chosen for kathin support is customarily one other than the one at which one usually makes merit, often a temple some distance away. Hence the kathin pulls the individual away from any parochial identification with his local temple, relating him with a larger Buddhist world. This larger Buddhist world is further manifested on such occasions as temple fairs, pilgrimages, and large scale celebrations like Thēd Mahāchāt, commemorating the Birth, Enlightenment and Death of the Buddha. These occasions serve to bind the individual to the supralocal, even universal, aspect of the Buddhist world-view. The Sangha — as the focus of merit-making — provides the skeleton of this larger world.

Merit-making rituals display key themes of sophisticated doctrine in everyday life. They might be viewed as symbolic exercises in which participants identify with the Buddhist view of the world and express their readiness, in some degree, to rid themselves of worldly attachments for religious (and social) rewards. Food, time, money and even selves are given to support and maintain the Sangha, the pinnacle of the Buddhist hierarchy and moral community. These are all objects the greedy or selfish person might like to keep for himself, without the goal of Buddhist commitments.

The identification of the Thai layman with, and his commitment to, the Buddhist world is very general. In rituals he learns that the path to salvation lies in giving up attachments, trying to move upward in the long moral hierarchy. But, in fact, the layman seeks long life, good health, prosperity, a happy marriage and family — a variety of goals that indicate his firm attachment to the things of the world. Does this make him a "bad" Buddhist? How can "good" lay Buddhists reconcile their commitments to an otherworldly Buddhism while maintaining an active involvement in the world? To some degree Thai laymen recognize the problem. But they may claim "they do not have the merit" to fully pursue the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Thereby, they recognize a basic doctrinal tenet: not all humans are equally capable of seeking — much less gaining — nirvana. While this general recognition exists, the formation of particular attachments — marriage, children, business concerns — could pose a moral problem, one partially confronted and mostly [illegible] in the non-Buddhist sector of Thai religion, as we shall see

Buddhist Religious Specialists

The major Buddhist religious specialist in the Buddhist sector of Thai religion is the monk (phra). However, novices (nēn) and "nuns" (mae chī) and the lay master of ceremonies (phō khru) also play some role. The Buddhist specialists can be distinguished by age, sex, and the number of religious precepts to which they adhere. The most important Buddhist roles are restricted to men, and full ordination as a monk is limited to those over twenty years old who meet a number of general qualifications (e.g., freedom from leprosy). The monk formally adheres to the full 227 rules of monastic discipline (Vinaya); the novice follows only ten. Buddhist nuns are relatively rare and, as in other Buddhist societies, are not greatly respected in Thailand, reflecting the relatively disadvantaged position of women in Buddhism. Commonly, nuns are elderly widows who have chosen to withdraw from the world, shave their heads and wear white robes (in contrast to the orange robes of Sangha members). Nuns follow only nine precepts. The ordinary lay person is enjoined to follow only five precepts, though the specially pious (often elderly) may occasionally volunteer to observe eight. Buddhist religious roles are all achieved and voluntary. Entrance criteria are defined by universalistic standards; and assuming such a role commonly involves some degree of formal training, e.g., learning Pali chants and the form of ceremonies. The Buddhist specialist is also free to leave his religious role at any time.

The strategic importance of Sangha and monk as symbols and proximate exemplars of Buddhist values and world-view has already been indicated. From the Thai perspective, being a monk is [illegible] undertaking. Following the 227 rules of the Vinaya effectively cuts off the monk from ordinary society and those things Thais consider "fun" (sanuk), a widely held Thai value. Just how important Thais consider the Sangha and the Buddhist order it represents, is suggested by a variety of formal and informal factors which insure its perpetuation; the maintenance of this order is not left to chance.

As the state religion, Buddhism in general and the Sangha in particular gain considerable support from the government agencies, which administer Sangha lands, support religious education, and reward religious expertise. Government employees may take leave (without loss of benefits) to enter the Sangha. Aside from such official support, there are numerous popular beliefs and informal pressures [illegible] persist [illegible]

Sangha. For example, there is a general ideal that all men should serve for a time in the Sangha. Though not all do, many spend at least a rainy season as monks. It is also widely believed that much of the merit acquired through ordination is gained by the ordinand's parents, particularly his mother — who is herself barred from the Sangha. Monastic service is also believed to have enduring beneficial characterological effects. Men who have served as monks are ripe (suk); men who have not are raw (dip). "Raw" men are thought to be poor marriage risks, so "ripe" men may have an advantage on the marriage market. Monastic service may also provide an enhancement of prestige, and possibly training in useful skills to be exploited on leaving the Sangha. And the Sangha has been an important vehicle for upward mobility in Thai society. Such beliefs and pressures — which insure a steady flow of men into the Sangha, thereby perpetuating the Buddhist hierarchical order — are so pervasive as to suggest that the maintenance of this Buddhist order is more than a religious value in the narrow sense; it is a broadly based social value as well.

The Sangha is more than a symbol of Buddhist values and world view; it is also an organization. In modern times the Sangha organization has been increasingly formalized and centralized — in many respects paralleling the bureaucratic organization of the Thai government. If anything, the Sangha penetrates more deeply into all reaches and levels of Thai society than the government does. This may be why the government has found it useful, in its efforts to create a national polity, to emphasize the close traditional relationship between Buddhism and the state, and to actively seek Sangha support for a variety of programmes relating to economic development and political integration. Indeed the organizational structure of the Sangha provides a kind of skeleton for a Thai national moral community with which persons from all walks of life and regions of the country can identify.

Social Focus and Participation.

The Buddhist moral community and the Thai national community are intricately interrelated. Buddhist symbols, Sangha, monks, Buddha images, temples and ceremonies are universally given special deference and respect; and concrete support of Buddhist institutions in terms of goods and services is substantial. The mass of Thai serve as "laity" for Buddhism; viewed society-wise, their support for Buddhism is continuous. However, there are differences in intensity of involvement of individuals.

according to sex and stage in the life cycle. For example, the degree of involvement of women with Buddhism is relatively constant until, with advancing age, it may increase. Men's involvement is more variable though it may also be more intense at particular points. While a monk, a man's involvement with Buddhism is virtually total. But in lay life, it is typically more sporadic and less intense until, with advancing age, men (like women) may retire from secular activities and increase their Buddhist involvement.

The commitment of Thai, individually or collectively, to Buddhist values and world view is nearly universal and is more than narrowly religious. Aside from specifically religious beliefs and ritual forms, Buddhism has supplied cognitive and evaluative elements that have been incorporated into Thai culture, built into the Thai social fabric, and internalized into the personalities of individual Thai. The values and conceptions acquired in the context of Buddhist rituals have been generalized and applied to non-ritual, non religious spheres. One might view Buddhism as providing a "cultural gyroscope" which has served to shape and direct the major facets of Thai culture and society. In this sense, the social focus of Buddhism could be characterized as the entirety of Thai society.

Brahmanic Elements in Thai Religion.

Students of Thai religion have noted the existence of a number of beliefs and practices that are not indigenous — because they are clearly derived from an Indian tradition — yet cannot be unequivocally identified as Buddhist. I have labelled such beliefs and practices "Brahmanic". Two main components of a Brahmanistic complex can be distinguished. One closely tied to royal institutions and the capital city, is "Court" Brahmanism; the other more widely diffused throughout Thai society, I term "Folk Brahmanism". My concern is here with primarily with the latter component, however, a few comments on "Court Brahmanism" are in order.

Inscriptions indicate that Brahmanistic elements were present in early Thai states along with Buddhist and indigenous elements. It appears that, as the state of Ayutthaya expanded and became more powerful, Brahmanistic elements (presumably derived from the Khmer) were used to enhance the prestige of Thai kingship. In the late fourteenth century when the Thai conquered the Khmer kingdom at Angkor, large numbers of Khmer, including sacerdotal officials and bureaucrats, were transported to Ayutthaya and incorporated into the state structure. The Thai court adopted numerous Brahmanistic [illegible]

largely [illegible] worship or symbolizing the state's concern for and control over those aspects of society such as agricultural fertility — the "divine kingship ritual" and the "First Ploughing" (*raek na*) ceremony, for example. Although most of the Brahmanistic rituals were confined to the elite in the capital, some — for instance, the tonsure (*phithī kō̜n čuk*) ceremony — were very popular for a time. Some of the ceremonies have been continued into the modern period, and "Court Brahmans" and astrologers still play some role at the royal court.

It is not clear precisely when or through what means the folk Brahman complex was incorporated into the Thai religious pattern. It could represent a survival from an early "Hinduized" period in Thai society, or it might be that these Folk Brahman elements were diffused from the elite to the masses after Court Brahmanism was institutionalized. In any case, Folk Brahman elements are pervasive — if not universal — in Thai religion, both urban and rural, which casts some doubt on both speculations. Another possibility is that the Folk Brahman complex was introduced and spread simultaneously with Theravada Buddhism. We shall see that there are extensive structural and functional links between the Folk Brahman complex and Buddhism which might support such a view. Unfortunately, to explore such a conjecture is beyond the scope of this paper.

Some contemporary village practitioners of Folk Brahman specialities claim their techniques are derived from the Brahman religion (*sātsanā phrām*). However, they identify themselves as Buddhists (as do most ethnic Thai), not as adherents of Brahmanism. Indeed, such practitioners are often men locally known for Buddhist expertise or piety. Though we shall see close connections between Folk Brahman practices and beliefs and those of Buddhism, these practices are not viewed as merit-making in themselves. If anything, such practices are viewed more as technology or science than as religion in the strict sense.[30] Folk Brahman beliefs also appear to be grounded in the Buddhist world-view, rather than in a distinctive world view of their own

Folk Brahman Goal Orientation and World View

The coherent Buddhist view of the moral order and man's place in that order — formulated by a number of key notions such as *karma* and multiple rebirth, popularized in such notions as merit and merit-making, and perpetuated by the Sangha and crystallized in Buddhist ritual forms encountered in everyday life — is thus accessible to all Thai. Although there are

a number of concepts particularly associated with Folk Brahman practices, these do not seem to form a coherent and integrated system of ideas and beliefs, a Brahmanistic world-view comparable to that of Buddhism. For example, Folk Brahman practitioners will sometimes call on a pantheon of gods (thewada) — along with the Buddha — to join in and witness some ceremony; and the notion of "soul elements" (khwan) is a basic feature of some very popular Folk Brahman rites. However, neither the notion of a pantheon of gods, nor that of khwan, nor any other Folk Brahman belief, is logically integrated into a distinctive world-view; rather, they are grounded in and draw their efficacy from the Buddhist world view, which Folk Brahmanism shares.

The Folk Brahman practice of calling on a pantheon of gods draws on the hierarchical structure of Buddhist world-view, particularly the popularized cosmological notions derived from it. That is, the deities invoked by the Folk Brahman practitioner are a part of the Buddhist cosmological scheme, not figures distinct from that scheme. Brahmanistic practice also shares the Buddhist view that there is a determinate level of reality (i.e. the karmically conditioned) existing beneath the flux of the phenomenal world. This level of reality is not only determinate, it can also be known — at least in part. Indeed, the ideal task of the Buddhist monk is to seek insight into this level of reality; but a Folk Brahman "seer" or "diviner" (mo du, literally "looking doctor") can also use his skills and ritual paraphernalia to tap this determinate level and provide clients with advice about possible courses of action.

The notion of khwan seems to be distinctively linked to the Folk Brahman complex. Each individual is thought to have a number of khwan, traditionally some thirty two. In ritual contexts khwan are often identified with various senses and faculties of the body — e.g., khwan of the eyes (khwan ta), khwan of the mouth (khwan pak), etc. — though not all thirty two are necessarily named. The numerous specific khwan are also collectively termed khwan. Khwan have a tendency to wander, to become disorganized or to disintegrate. Such disintegration is manifested in a variety of symptoms treated by a Folk Brahman specialist, the "soul tying doctor" (mo su khwan), who recalls the khwan to the body and reintegrates them. Though there is some dispute about the derivation of the khwan notion, it bears striking similarities to the sophisticated Buddhist notion of khandha, "aggregates" or "bundles"

that make up the individual.

Though Folk Brahmanism draws on many salient features of the Buddhist world-view, there is one important respect in which it differs from Buddhism: its aims or goals. In contrast to the other-worldly orientation encouraged by Buddhism (in ultimate terms escape from karma, achieving extinction; more proximately gaining paradise or an enhanced rebirth), Folk Brahman practice is most commonly directed to this-worldly problems, its ceremonies seeking such ends as good health, prosperity, luck in some undertaking, or a happy and auspicious marriage. Folk Brahman practices also come into play at various points in the life cycle and in the cycle of the seasons. Despite the apparent incongruity between the this-worldly focus of Folk Brahman practice and the other-worldly focus of Buddhism, these foci are not in opposition but are closely intertwined.

Folk Brahman Ritual

Folk Brahmanism has no distinctive and coherent world-view which distinguishes it from Buddhism; its beliefs and practices are based on conceptions and ideas drawn from Buddhism. In this sense, Folk Brahmanism does not constitute a separate and autonomous religious system vis-a-vis Buddhism, but rather consists of a number of interrelated ritual complexes which can be related to Buddhist values and beliefs. Because of its close links with Buddhism and the kinds of problems Folk Brahmanism addresses, it might be seen as a kind of "secular" or this-worldly arm of Buddhism proper.

Just as Buddhist rituals are deemed to be automatically efficacious in producing merit, Folk Brahman rituals are also believed to be automatically effective. That is, given the proper conditions (e.g. the seer having correct information regarding date and time of birth, the ceremony being performed properly), the desired results or correct advice will follow; any apparent failures are attributed to erroneous information supplied or improper procedure followed or possibly lack of skill of the particular specialist employed. Since successful performances are likely to be remembered, and any failures forgotten or explained away, faith in the effectiveness of Folk Brahman ceremonies is rarely challenged. There are numerous highly specialized tasks that Folk Brahman ceremonies may address. However there are two general ritual tasks which seem especially important. The first might be characterized as legitimating this-worldly involvements; the second involves a therapeutic function.

As we observed earlier, Buddhism poses special problems for the lay person. On the one hand Buddhist doctrine and ritual encourage freeing oneself from various worldly attachments in order to gain religious rewards. On the other hand, the layman inevitably is deeply involved in this-worldly preoccupations. To some degree, the this-worldly involvement can be rationalized by karmic doctrine itself which holds that the path to Nirvana is long and difficult; only those with especially good karmic qualifications accumulated over many life-times can aspire to the arduous discipline and self-control that leads to final insight into the causes of suffering and release from that suffering. Further legitimation may come by relating one's life as a lay Buddhist to religiously sanctioned activity like merit-making; in merit-making the layman not only supports the Sangha, he also divests himself of at least some of his worldly goods. And in pursuing a family, the layman provides future monks and supporters of the Buddhist Order. Hence there are a variety of rationales — doctrinal and ritual — that provide some general legitimation of the layman's involvement in the world. Certain Folk Brahman beliefs and practices may provide further legitimation dealing with particular aspects of the layman's worldly activities. This is one of the tasks performed by the seer or mō dū.

Each seer has his own particular mode of ritual performance, acquired from a teacher. Though there are numerous variations in practice, there are some common features; seers usually use various techniques of astrological manipulations. Although seers do not phrase their activities in this way, what they do is to partially penetrate the ignorance and illusion of the world of the senses, to reach the order of reality — past, present and future — that is determinate and knowable to those with appropriate knowledge and skill. This permits a seer to inform a lay client that an activity under consideration (forming an attachment through marriage, gaining a profit through business or whatever) is appropriate and proper in terms of astrological reality, an order of reality beyond phenomenal reality but consistent with karmic reality. In essence the seer provides for the person committed to this-worldly Buddhism a sanction and moral legitimation for his this-worldly activities, serving as a bridge between the absolutist Buddhist moral order and the day-to-day interests and activities of the ordinary villager.

Folk Brahman religious therapy is best exemplified by the soul-tying (<u>su khwan</u>) ceremony which Tambiah has discussed extensively in terms of complementarity and reciprocity at the village level. This ceremony is a w[illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] of

"soul elements" or *khwan* to become disintegrated. Although a problem that may affect anyone, it is especially common in children and young people. Disintegrated *khwan* may be manifested by a variety of symptoms (listlessness, straying attention, etc.); the condition is thought to be especially dangerous because it makes the affected individual particularly vulnerable to attack by spirits (*phī*). The soul-tying ceremony is not restricted to individuals manifesting symptoms of *khwan* disorganization; it is often performed as a kind of preventive therapy — routinely practised on occasions such as prior to a young man's ordination as a monk, before taking a trip or entering the army, and is a basic part of village weddings. Under these circumstances, soul tying insures that the individual will be at his best and strongest.

Certain individuals known as "soul-tying doctors" (*mǭ suKhwan*) thought to be especially adept and efficacious in performing the soul-tying ritual are called on when circumstances warrant a real expert, but the general technique of "soul-tying" is widely known, and virtually any one may perform it. In its most elaborate form the ceremony begins with the practitioner's making special acknowledgement of Buddhist symbols (e.g., the Triple Gems) and other teachers from whom the practitioner learned his special technique. The various gods (*thewadā*) are invoked individually and collectively, and invited to witness and assist in the ceremony. The soul-tying doctor then calls on the various *khwan* to return to the individual's body and take their proper place there. Finally, the *khwan* are symbolically tied to the individual's body with bits of white cotton string tied to his wrist. Spectators in the ceremony may also be invited to tie strings to their wrists as well. A meal composed of items thought to be especially lucky may then be consumed by all present.

I suggested earlier that the notion of the individual consisting of a set of soul elements is suggestive of the abstract Buddhist notion of the individual being made up of a number of "bundles" or "aggregates" (*khandhā*). It is intriguing to note that other Buddhist peoples of Southeast Asia are reported to have notions similar to that of the Thai *khwan*. Perhaps roots of the *khwan* concept are to be found in a Buddhist psychology. At any rate the therapeutic function performed by the soul-tying ceremony operates to restore the lay Buddhist to his fullest potential, at various strategic points in his career as well as when he is ill. In particular, it works in conjunction with — not in opposition to — the Buddhist element in Thai religion.

Folk Brahman Practitioners.

There are numerous Folk Brahman specialists found in village religion, each practitioner being known for his own distinctive skill. For example, in addition to the seer and the soul tying doctor, there are specialists in finding lost objects (*mǭ hā*) and "good luck doctors" (*mǭ sīa khrō*) who cleanse a household of inauspicious

in [illegible] at [illegible] year or after a pro-
longed illness in a household. Like Buddhist religious
roles, Folk Brahman specialties are acquired, ordi-
narily by means of a period of training in the particular
technique of a mentor, usually serving as a layman in the
Sangha, with an older adept monk or teacher. Indeed,
active monks may perform some of the Brahmanistic
ceremonies, [illegible] those associated with weddings,
for lay people. Since these Brahmanistic skills
are commonly learned during monastic service,
it is understandable that Folk Brahman
practitioners are overwhelmingly men. This also
suggests why the Buddhist world-view is the
basic source of whatever Brahmanistic
world-view there is and why there is no intrinsic
opposition or hostility between the Buddhist
and Folk Brahman elements of Thai religion.

Unlike the monk, the Folk Brahman practi-
tioner is not cut off from ordinary society.
He lives the life of an ordinary villager, providing
his services to clients who seek him out. Some of
these Folk Brahman practitioners have wide-
spread reputations as experts in their specialty
and are highly regarded within their own
communities. This respect comes not only
because of their Brahmanistic skills but also
because they manifest personal qualities -
such as wisdom, equanimity, and piety -
which are generally admired.

Social Focus and Participation

Although the mass of the Thai populace does not
act as a body for the Folk Brahman element
in Thai religion, Folk Brahmanism serves as a
resource to be called on when needed. An
individual faced with some decision or
choice, or manifesting symptoms of illness, or
undergoing an important transition in life may
become a client of the appropriate Folk
Brahman specialist. After the ceremony or
service has been provided, the client's specific
support of the Folk Brahman element ceases
until needed again. Thus involvement with and
participation in Folk Brahman activities tend to
be intermittent and discontinuous, in contrast to
the situation with respect to Buddhism.

Attitudes towards Folk Brahman practices
are generally positive. This may be due not only
to the real services performed by the Folk Brahman
practitioners and their respected position in
the community, but also to several very close
relationships that exist between Folk Brahman
elements and Buddhism: ideological, in that
Folk Brahman practices draw on the Buddhist
world-view; structural, in that Brahman
specialists have typically learned their skills
while in the Sangha; and functional, in
that Folk Brahman practices provide
answers to puzzles posed by Buddhist
belief.

The Folk Brahman element in Thai religion
acts as an intermediary between the particula-
rities of everyday life and the relatively
limited guidance of formal Buddhist
precepts for the lay Buddhist. Brahman
rituals not only affirm the fundamental
truths of the Buddhist world-view, they also
provide the immediate basic morality [illegible]

surly lot, jealous of human beings and ready to attack those who have, inadvertently or not, offended them, or those who are especially susceptible to attack (e.g., those with weak or disorganized khwan). Animistic practitioners attempt to cure those afflicted by spirits by contacting the spirits, placating them, and having them remove the illness.

Buddhism and Folk Brahmanism share the assumptions that there is a determinate and knowable level of reality beneath the flux of the phenomenal world, and that their rituals are automatically effective. But spirits inhabit a level of reality which only intersects with phenomenal reality; their actions are thought to be capricious and unpredictable. Even animist practitioners like the spirit-doctors (mo phi) might express doubts about the effectiveness of their rituals. This uncertainty is due not only to the capriciousness of spirits, but also because spirits themselves are thought to dominate the rituals; the spirit-doctor merely provides a medium or bridge to the spirit-world, she does not control it. The indeterminacy of animist rituals may be why, unless a person's symptoms are unambiguously those of spirit-attack, they are resorted to only after the means of Folk Brahmanism and Buddhism have been exhausted.

Animist Ritual

When an individual manifests symptoms suggesting that a spirit has attacked him (restlessness, loss of appetite, etc.) or when a patient does not respond to other modes of treatment, a spirit-specialist will be called on. It is more usual for an ill person to go first to a Folk Brahman curer for initial diagnosis and/or treatment and be referred by him to a "spirit doctor." The main task of the spirit-doctor is to communicate with the aggrieved spirit causing the illness, discover what has offended the spirit and what sacrifice will make amends. Since spirits dominate the ceremony, each ceremony is thought to be unique and distinctive, though they do follow a general form. The spirit-doctor may drink whiskey and dance in an erratic and ungraceful way, accompanied by music. While dancing, she calls on the spirits, particularly her "familiar spirit" (yaw), until a trance-like state is introduced. She then communicates with the spirit-world and, after some haggling, strikes a bargain for the cure of the patient. Many of the features associated with the animist rituals (use of whiskey, dancing and trance-like state) stand in direct opposition to many paramount values of Buddhism (sobriety, self-restraint), and of Folk Brahmanism as well.

Animist Practitioners

In contrast to Buddhist religious specialists and Folk Brahman practitioners, spirit-doctors tend to be women. Although they may assume some peculiarities, dress or food taboos, or claim a relation to their familiar spirit, spirit-doctors are otherwise indistinguishable from their

follows. In contrast to the achieved and universalistic features of the Buddhist and Folk Brahman religious roles, there are ascriptive and particularistic elements involved in becoming a spirit-doctor. For example, it is believed that becoming a spirit-doctor is not voluntary, as it is with monks, seers and khwan doctors. A spirit "chooses" a woman who is familiar, and coerces her by threat of illness and even death. Some spirit-doctors claim that despite these threats, they held off the spirit's call until too weak to resist. Some also believe that spirits show a fondness for women who are related, e.g. sisters, mother and daughter, aunt and niece. Taking on a Buddhist and Folk Brahman role typically involves some measure of learning of chants, techniques, or other lore. By contrast popular belief holds that the spirit brings all necessary skills to the spirit-doctor, so no learning is involved on her part.

Occasionally several spirit-doctors may come together to perform a ceremony at which they collectively "feed" their spirits (liang phi). But primarily, spirit-doctors act as individuals; they do not form a distinctive organization or group which acts to elaborate and perpetuate a distinctive animist ideology or world-view, as does the Sangha for Buddhism. The perpetuation of animist beliefs and practices relies primarily on the maintenance of popular beliefs about the significance, functions and importance of spirits. In this regard the animist component of Thai religion benefits from the fact that Buddhist cosmology and belief has included spirits as a part of its formal and popular belief system.

- Participants and Social Focus

Being a spirit-doctor is a part-time specialty, providing services to clients when needed. Except for the spirit-doctors, involvement with animist elements is intermittent and generally of low intensity, and support is not routinely maintained. The main instance of collective involvement with animist elements is ceremonies directed to propitiation of the village tutelary spirits. (Intriguingly, the individual in charge of this ceremony, the Cao Cam Phi Puta, is a man, in contrast to the dominance of females in other animist roles). A few generalizations can be made about who is likely to encounter spirits in his or her life. Women, children, and those with weak khwan are likely objects of the spirits' attention, and the period around childbirth is especially dangerous for both mother and child. The impoverished are more likely to be involved in animist activities than the well-to-do, and less accessible regions are likely to have a higher incidence of animist elements than more accessible areas. In general,

where Buddhist and/or Folk Brahman involvement and activities are high, animist involvement and activity is likely to be low.

In contrast to the respect accorded Buddhist and Folk Brahman features, though there is little overt hostility, considerable ambivalence is expressed about the entire animist domain, even by those most deeply involved in it. With the exception of the person in charge of the cult of the tutelary spirit, most animist practitioners have little respect or prestige among their fellows. There are clearly deep-seated cleavages between animistic elements and Buddhism and Folk Brahmanism. In many respects, animism stands in symbolic opposition to what Buddhism values most highly: asceticism, self-control and predictability. The superior potency of Buddhism over animistic threats is taken as axiomatic by Thai. Monks are held to be immune from spirit attacks; and Buddhist symbols, chants, holy water and inscriptions may be used to overcome malevolent spirits or to exorcise them. Indeed, some claim the spirits cannot harm any truly devout Buddhist, lay or monk. However, since Buddhist cosmology itself affirms the existence of the spirit-order, there is no doubt about the phenomenal reality of spirits (except, possibly, among the most sophisticated).

In contrast to the society-wide focus of Buddhism and the more regional aspect of Folk Brahmanism, animism tends to be highly localized; malevolent spirits and spirit-doctors operate within a narrowly restricted region. Hence animist elements display a wider range of variability in beliefs and practices throughout Thailand than either Buddhism or Folk Brahmanism, although similarities in form and pattern can be discerned. Insofar as animistic elements are effective, they tend to tie individuals to a specific 'locality,' rather than bring them into a wider 'world' as do both Buddhism and Folk Brahmanism.

Thai Religious Complexity: Comparisons and Contrasts

Before turning to the historical dimension of Thai religious complexity, it might be fruitful to summarize the analysis thus far. The previous discussion was not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to single out three major components that can be analytically distinguished in Thai religion: Theravada Buddhism, a Brahmanistic element with two facets, Court and Folk, and an animistic component. I will highlight similarities and differences between the components and suggest how they are interrelated

to form a coherent Thai religious pattern. The comparisons and contrasts are summarized in Table I.

TABLE I Summary of Three Components of Thai Religion

	Buddhism	Brahmanism	Animism
Goal orientation	other-worldly	this-worldly	this-worldly
World-view	determinate-certain	determinate-certain	capricious-uncertain
Ritual	standard-routine	standard-routine	individually-tailored
Specialists	predominantly-male	predominantly male	predominantly female
Recruitment	universalistic achievement	universalistic achievement	particularistic ascription
Participants	laity	client	client
Involvement	constant	intermittent	intermittent
Attitudes toward	highly favorable	favorable	ambivalent
Social focus	whole society	overlapping locality & society	highly localized

There are four important contrasts between Buddhism and the other two components of Thai religion: Buddhism is oriented primarily to other-worldly goals; the entire populace serves as a laity for Buddhism; their support for and involvement in Buddhism is constant; and Buddhism's social focus encompasses the entirety of Thai society. Animism contrasts with the other components in five ways: an animist world-view involves capricious and unpredictable elements; spirit-practitioners tend to be women; such practitioners are recruited ascriptively and particularistically; animism is viewed with considerable ambivalence; and its social focus is local in scope. Folk Brahmanism appears to be interstitial between the Buddhist and animist components. As such, it does not present any distinctive features that contrast with those of the other two components, though it does share more features

in common with Buddhism than with animism.

The Buddhist and Brahmanistic components share several features: both involve a deterministic and predictable world-view; their rituals follow standardized forms and are thought to be automatically efficacious; specialists' roles are achieved and defined by universalistic standards; practitioners tend to be men; and attitudes toward both components are strongly positive. Though the social focus of Buddhism, relating to the entirety of Thai society (and beyond), is more inclusive than that of Brahmanism, the two are related. Folk Brahmanism serves to integrate regions and individuals into the Buddhist system and to stabilize this relationship.

Brahmanism and animism share the following features: both are oriented to mundane this-worldly matters; participation in both is on a client basis; and involvement in and support of both is intermittent. It should also be noted that Buddhism and animism appear mutually opposed on all dimensions considered here, and animism contrasts with both Buddhism and Brahmanism on several dimensions: its indeterminate and unpredictable world-view; the fluid structure of its rituals; predominance of women practitioners; particularistic and ascriptive features in recruitment of specialists; and the ambivalence toward animism generally.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, the pattern of Thai religious complexity might be characterized thus: Buddhism stands at the apex of the Thai religious system and forms a central part of Thai social values. Buddhism provides a coherent and integrated system of beliefs, practices and specialists, sanctioned by a codified orthodoxy, the Sangha, political authority, and the Thai masses. The Sangha perpetuates Buddhist values and beliefs, and stands as a proximate symbol and living embodiment of them. It is through the religious Sangha and Buddhist ritual system that these values are displayed to be internalized in one form or another, by all Thai. Thereby, Buddhism penetrates all levels and sectors of Thai society. Buddhism provides the Thai with a unitary set of values and a common ritual and expressive language, uniting them in a larger Buddhist moral community that transcends particularistic and local loyalties and attachments.

Given the paramount position of Buddhism within the Thai religious pattern, both Brahmanist and animist ~~patterns~~ components can be understood only in relation to Buddhism. In this regard, though Folk Brahm[illegible] upon a [illegible]

discrete but interrelated complexes, it might be viewed primarily as a "sub-system" of the larger Buddhist system. This view is supported by the fact that the Buddhist and Brahman world-views are isomorphic, if not completely coterminous. The Sangha, traditionally serving as a major repository of Brahman expertise and as the training ground of Brahman practitioners, not only closely links the Brahman component of Thai religion with Buddhist institutions, but makes its very perpetuation dependent on such links. Finally, Brahmanistic beliefs and practices serve to mediate a number of basic religious problems Buddhism poses for members of the laity but does not directly resolve – those of forming attachments; the moral significance of health, illness, and prosperity; and involvement in the mundane world. Essentially, Folk Brahmanism provides a system of religious therapy, and also legitimates the involvement of the lay Buddhist in ordinary society without posing a threat to his Buddhist commitments or to his own basic morality. One can only speculate about a situation – in Thailand or any other Theravada Buddhist society – in which there were no mediating mechanisms such as Folk Brahmanism provides between the other-worldly values of Buddhism and the mundane matters the mass of the lay Buddhists are involved in. Perhaps understanding the buffering role Folk Brahmanism plays in Thai religion – between abstract Buddhist values and exigencies and particularities of the layman's ordinary life – helps us to understand the fact that formal Buddhism is never found without a set of 'non-Buddhist' elements present as well.

Among early students of Thai religion Landon and Le May were impressed with the apparent persistence of animistic elements in Thai religion over many centuries. Despite this undoubted persistence, animism in contemporary Thai religion appears fragmentary, disorganized and unsystematic – particularly when compared with other components of Thai religion. While one can perceive some uniformities in form and content, animism does not appear to be an autonomous or coherent system of beliefs and practices parallel to those of Buddhism and Brahmanism. One exception to this generalization may be where animistic features are articulated with Buddhist cosmology and beliefs. In this connection, animism might be viewed as providing a "symbolic opposition" to Buddhist conceptions of order. The capriciousness and malice of spirits provides an image of the kind of chaos and disorder which might exist if a Buddhist order did not prevail. However, the disorder

imagined by [illegible] part with the image of Buddhist order, for the latter is assumed always to prevail. Buddhist symbols are capable of exorcising the spirits, but spirits are ineffective against Buddhism. Even though Buddhist order ultimately prevails, there is always the possibility of animist disorder breaking through. This possibility, in fact, provides a degree of tension release for those on whom Buddhism places an unusual strain or who occupy a disadvantaged position vis-a-vis Buddhism. Such considerations may help us to understand the free-floating quality of animistic elements in Thai religion, as well as the prominent place women have in animistic practice.

This effort to characterize a pattern of Thai religious complexity is undoubtedly oversimplified. However, it may provide a point of departure for a more intensive investigation of variability within Thai religion and for viewing Thai religion and society comparatively, as one part of a larger range of variability encompassing all those societies in which Theravada Buddhism is found. The pattern outlined above may also help us in examining fluctuations and shifts in Thai religion and society throughout history. It should not be taken to imply that Thai religion ever was, or is now, a neatly integrated and balanced homeostatic system which has persisted autonomously and without effort. There have been and continue to be, tensions and strains within and between the various components of Thai religion, as well as in their articulation with other aspects of Thai society. For example there is a kind of tension between Buddhism and animism which is built into the very fabric of Thai religion itself. Aside from this intrinsic tension, there undoubtedly have been others that can be discerned in the historical development of Thai religion and Thai society.

In the following section, I shall propose that an overall process of religious development can be discerned in the sweep of Thai history. I shall note several points where tension within Thai religion, or between religion and Thai society, seem to have occurred. Finally, I shall note some recent changes in Thai religion and society which may pose significant problems in the future.

Historical Dimensions of Thai Religious Complexity

In the absence of a precisely detailed record of the development of Thai religion and society, I wish to draw on a theoretical perspective that can guide our speculations about that development — speculations which can then be checked against future historical research. The theoretical perspective was formulated by M. Marriott in his effort [illegible] the relationship [illegible]

of an indigenous Thai religion; however, its internal structure might provide a new, more complex and systematic order of relations between indigenous entities and beliefs. Whatever relationships had previously been thought to exist between indigenous spirits, their identification with Buddhist cosmology would make these relationships explicable in terms of abstract concepts such as Karma or more popular beliefs about merit. The parochialization of Buddhist cosmology and belief might make it easier to spread Buddhism in initial contacts. But the attendant universalization of indigenous beliefs could only serve to transform the religious scene, making it more complex and differentiated than it had been previously. I am proposing that the Thai adoption of Theravada Buddhism set in motion the twin processes of universalization and parochialization, which facilitated the spread of Buddhism among the Thai peoples, and simultaneously transformed their religious and social system, a process I term "upgrading".

Such a process of upgrading does not occur in a vacuum; nor once set in motion, does it automatically continue. Nor can it be seen as a once-and-for-all event; it is a continuing process. A central feature of the upgrading process in Thai religion is the continued existence of the Buddhist Sangha. Monks are dedicated to the preservation of some degree of Buddhist orthodoxy and the penetration of Buddhist values and ideas into lives of ordinary people. We observed earlier that the perpetuation of the Sangha, and the order it represents, is a widely held value of all Thai, supported by a variety of formal and informal pressures. While it might be useful to think of Ramkamhaeng's inscription as indicating that the upgrading process had already been activated, it can be seen as continuing throughout Thai history and into the contemporary scene. The process of upgrading was not always even; and various points in Thai history can be taken to illustrate instances where the process was open to alternative directions or was responding to special situational exigencies.

The Thai religious and social pattern was elaborated and stabilized during the long period of Ayutthayan dominance from the 14th to the 18th Century. This period saw the elaboration of Court Brahmanism as the State was expanded and centralized, and more and more Thai were incorporated into the Buddhist-dominated pattern. The 'revolution of 1688' was a response to external threats to the autonomy and integrity of this pattern, ensuring its maintenance intact. The chaos that followed the collapse of Ayutthaya manifests several intriguing problems to be explored further. For example, one of the contenders for paramount power was Phra Fang, a monk who maintained his monastic robes but sought political hegemony. His army apparently included men who also wore yellow robes of the monks despite the [illegible] soldiers

was deposed by the forces of Taksin, who took over the Thai kingship. On the one hand, Taksin sought to restore the traditional religious and social order with the aid of Buddhist and Brahman experts; on the other hand, he expressed heterodox views which threatened that order. Among other things, he claimed extraordinary religious qualities and required that monks venerate him, reversing the traditional order of respect between monks and king.

Taksin was deposed and power was assumed by Rama I who also set out to restore the traditional pattern, emphasizing the preeminence of Buddhism while legitimating Brahmanist and animist elements. Rama I was more successful than Taksin, and his successors continued the process of elaborating and stabilizing the complex religious pattern, with Buddhism at the pinnacle. Rama IV, better known as King Mongkut, is another strategic figure. He initiated a series of religious and social reforms which helped set the mould for the modern Thai state, including an effort to upgrade the standards of the Thai Sangha, modifying certain royal ceremonies to conform more closely to Buddhist ideas of kingship, and the disregarding numerous traditional beliefs about cosmology and astrology. Mongkut's reforms encouraged the Buddhization process, and the thrust of these reforms was continued by his successors — particularly his son King Chulalongkorn, whose long reign (1868–1910) brought the Thai into the modern world.

Changes in Modern Thai Religion and Society

King Chulalongkorn continued the religious and social reforms initiated by his father. For example, he formalized Mongkut's Sangha reforms by recognizing the Thammayut "reform" group as a part of the larger Thai Sangha, in addition to the Mahanikai monks, who follow a more traditional mode of monastic discipline. Thammayut monks and temples subsequently spread throughout the kingdom, serving as exemplars of a more rigorous monastic discipline. Chulalongkorn also sought to rationalize the administrative structure of the kingdom, and he established the national secular school system. Traditionally education had been primarily religious, taking place within the temple. This new development, among other things, freed the monk to pursue his religious tasks more diligently if he chose to do so. Chulalongkorn also initiated the rationalization and centralization of the Sangha, paralleling the organization of the government. National standards were set for monks, and eventually Buddhist Universities were located in Bangkok to improve their training. More recently, the central government has sought to involve the Sangha in national efforts to develop the country, and to use monks as religious ambassadors to non-Buddhist minorities in the kingdom.

The overall thrust of the modern developments has been to emphasize the central position of Buddhism in Thai religion and society, and to elevate the level of religious

was defeated by the forces of Taksin, who took over the Thai kingship. On the one hand, Taksin sought to restore the traditional religious and social order with the aid of Buddhist and Brahman experts; on the other hand, he expressed heterodox views which threatened that order. Among other things, he claimed extraordinary religious qualities and required that monks venerate him, reversing the traditional order of respect between monks and king.

Taksin was deposed and power was assumed by Rama I who also sought to restore the traditional pattern, emphasizing the pre-eminence of Buddhism while legitimating Brahmanist and animist elements. Rama I was more successful than Taksin, and his successors continued the process of elaborating and stabilizing the complex religious pattern, with Buddhism at the pinnacle. Rama IV, better known as King Mongkut, is another strategic figure. He initiated a series of religious and social reforms which helped set the model for the modern Thai state, including an effort to upgrade the standards of the Thai Sangha, modifying certain royal ceremonies to conform more closely to Buddhist ideas of kingship, and the disregarding numerous traditional beliefs about cosmology and astrology. Mongkut's reforms encouraged the Buddhaization process, and the thrust of these reforms was continued by his successors — particularly his son King Chulalongkorn, whose long reign (1688–1910) brought the Thai into the modern world.

Changes in Modern Thai Religion and Society

King Chulalongkorn continued the religious and social reforms initiated by his father. For example, he formalized Mongkut's Sangha reforms by recognizing the Thammayut "reform" group as a part of the larger Thai Sangha, in addition to the Mahanikai monks, who follow a more traditional mode of monastic discipline. Thammayut monasteries and temples subsequently spread throughout the kingdom, serving as exemplars of a more rigorous monastic discipline. Chulalongkorn also sought to rationalize the administrative structure of the kingdom, and he established the national secular school system. Traditionally education had been primarily religious, taking place within the temple. This new development freed the monk to pursue his religious tasks more diligently if he chose to do so. Chulalongkorn also initiated the rationalization and centralization of the Sangha, paralleling the organization of the government. National standards were set for monks, and eventually Buddhist Universities were located in Bangkok to improve their training. More recently, the central government has sought to involve the Sangha in national efforts to develop the country, and to use monks as religious ambassadors to non-Buddhist minorities in the kingdom.

The overall thrust of the modern developments has been to emphasize the central position of Buddhism in Thai religion and society, and to elevate the level of religious

sophistication within the Sangha, with some exceptions, the monk's religious specialization has been increased, providing an opportunity for upgrading his position. But this has also made being a monk a more difficult task than was previously the case. Thus the flow of men into and out of the Sangha may have diminished somewhat, though those who do enter may stay for longer periods of time and reach higher levels of religious sophistication.

Since there are close, ideological, structural, and functional connections between Buddhism and Folk Brahman elements in the pattern of Thai religion, any changes affecting Buddhism — especially the Sangha — are also likely to affect Folk Brahmanism. Modern trends encourage a higher degree of Buddhist orthodoxy for monks, which might well lead to the definition of much esoteric Brahmanistic lore as "superstition" or perhaps as "too secular" to interest the modern monk. And, if fewer men enter the Sangha and/or stay for longer periods of time, there may be fewer men available to learn traditional Brahmanistic specialties and bring them back to the lay world.

One reason why Folk Brahmanism was traditionally tied to the Sangha was that most Brahmanistic ceremonies assume a degree of literacy formerly available only in the monkhood. With increasing national literacy, and expanded publication and dissemination of books dealing with subjects such as curing, astrology, etc., lore once the property of Folk Brahman practitioners is now made available to virtually anyone. Such general accessibility without the intervention of the Sangha may actually devalue such knowledge and techniques, making them a game rather than serious business. At any rate, the contemporary situation may break the close linkage that once existed between the Sangha and Folk Brahman skills. Even as this break has been taking place, the value of the therapeutic functions performed by Folk Brahmanism has been undermined through more general availability of Western medicine; numerous "travelling" injection doctors" (mo chidya) are available to treat various symptoms once dealt with exclusively through khwan ceremonies. Hence, the demand for Folk Brahman expertise may be diminishing at the same time that fewer individuals are trying to acquire such skills.

Various facets of modern Thai society have tended to undermine the Folk Brahman component of Thai religion. This has not involved any direct confrontation between such practices and "modernity", but rather a withering away of interest and support. The situation may pose serious threats to Thai religion. Earlier I argued that one of the main functions of Folk Brahmanism was to mediate, for the ordinary Buddhist layman, ultimate Buddhist

and the exigencies of everyday life. If the Folk Brahman component were to disappear, abstract Buddhism would have to directly confront the problems formerly met by this component of Thai religion: affirmation of the basic morality of the laity despite their involvement in the mundane world, legitimation of the formation of attachments in the world, and accounting for the moral implications of illness. Perhaps this situation explains the apparent increasing interest in meditation on the part of Thai lay Buddhists (and monks). At any rate an unmediated confrontation between abstract Buddhism and the vicissitudes of everyday life may be a crucial test of the vitality of Thai religion, a test that holds both threat and promise.

Historical and contemporary evidence suggests that the animistic component of Thai religion has also undergone deep attrition, as Thai religion and society have been increasingly Buddhaized. Since certain aspects commonly attributed to animism (e.g., the very notion of *phi*) are also included in traditional Buddhist cosmologies, such items are not likely to disappear. If the animistic component provides a kind of symbolic opposition to the Buddhist world-view, its perpetuation is linked closely to the perpetuation of Buddhism. And, if animistic elements provide a measure of tension release from the stringent demands on the individual, it might even be that animistic manifestations could actually increase as the tensions of living in the modern world also increase.

REFERENCES

29. H. G. Q. Wales, Siamese State Ceremonies: Their History and Function, London: B. Quaritch, 1931, surveys some of the court Brahman ceremonies adopted by the Thai. See also his Ancient Siamese Government and Administration.

30. See the Griswold and Prasert series Epigraphic & Historical Studies by A. B. Griswold & Prasert Na Nagara which has appeared in J.S.S. starting with LVI (1965).

H. H. Prince Dhani Nivat, A History of Buddhism in Siam, Bangkok: Siam Society, 1965, provides a useful historical overview of Buddhism in Thailand.

31. For example, various "Brahman" figures were prominent in the procession that carried the King in circumambulation of the old city walls in Bangkok, on the occasion of his 36th birthday in 1963. The first ploughing ceremony is still performed in Bangkok, though today it has become more of a tourist spectacle than a national ritual; E. Young, The Kingdom of the Yellow Robe (Westminster: Constable, 1898), p. 64 f., 78 f. notes the popularity of such Brahman ceremonies as the tonsure ceremony, though such ceremonies have now virtually disappeared among the public. However, the modern wedding ceremony followed in Bangkok has much Brahman symbolism. (e.g., pouring lustral water from a conch shell onto a bridal couple).